

Volume 12.2 – Special Issue 'Musicology on Screen' (2022)

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Editorial - Estrella Senda, Barley Norton and Joseph Owen Jackson

It is with great pleasure that we share with you a special issue devoted to *Musicology on Screen*, co-edited by Dr Estrella Senda, and guest editors Prof Barley Norton (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Dr Joseph Owen Jackson (SOAS, University of London). A key motivation for this issue was to provide a space to nurture the unique potential of artistic audiovisual research and to contribute to the production of knowledge in ways that expand the scope of the written text alone. We were especially interested in enhancing multidisciplinary approaches to sound, music and practice research by bringing together practice research on diverse screen media at the intersection between sound and image and in dialogue with the written word. This multidisciplinary emphasis is evident in the collaborative editorial approach, with editors bringing different research expertise across different disciplines: Estrella Senda's creative research on festivals and film with a regional focus in Senegal; Barley Norton's musicological research and filmmaking experience in Vietnam; and Joseph Owen Jackson's research on transatlantic digital media, with a particular focus on Afrodiasporic audiovisual art's intercontinental movements back and forth Africa, America and Europe. Having just pioneered an [Accessibility policy](#), at *Screenworks* we were also concerned with broadening and diversifying the scope of published work, with regard to the regions represented and the voices engaged, from researchers to reviewers and readers-viewers-listeners. While fully aware of the long road ahead in this respect, we are delighted to be publishing seven practice-research works concerned with diverse music cultures across the globe. We are equally grateful to all peer reviewers, also from across different continents, for their close engagement with the work, as the first viewers, listeners and readers for this *Musicology on Screen* special issue.

There have been increasing moves in academia to go 'beyond text' over the last few decades. This includes a diverse range of artistic or practice research that engages with different audiovisual formats and media (Cox, Irving and Wright 2016; Ferrarini and Scaldaferrri 2020; Vannini 2020). Video essayists such as Catherine Grant and Liz Greene have also noted the great potential of the Internet in the field of creative critical practice (Grant, 2015, Greene, 2020 and 2022). In their special issues on sound in film, Grant and Greene invite researchers "to consider the integrated nature of sound and music in film" (Greene, 2020) and move beyond the "image-centrism" in film studies (Grant, 2015), through the curation of a thematic series of audiovisual essays. Greene refers to Danijela Kulezic-Wison's call to "look[ing] for the musicality of film", which allows films to be watched audiovisually (Kulezic-Wison, cited in Greene, 2022).

In musicology, artistic research in the areas of composition and music performance is well established and some of this work involves moving images, primarily as a method of documentation. Yet the full potential of film as a medium for exploring musicological issues is still underexplored, partly due to lingering concerns about how musicological issues, theory and knowledge can be effectively developed audiovisually (Norton 2021; Harbert 2018). Without attempting to definitively resolve all these concerns, this special issue seeks to highlight the potential of the audiovisual for musicological research through sharing innovative practice-led films. The varied approaches taken by the contributors to this special issue point to the range of audiovisual modes that can be used to explore the creative processes of making and experiencing music across cultures.

Carol Vernallis emphasises that digitalisation in our contemporary epoch blurs strict categorisations which have traditionally separated sounds and images on an ontological level, especially since both forms of communication may now share code (through online platforms such as *Screenworks*) and “an adjustment in one medium can spur a modification in the other, and then back and forth again, nearly effortlessly” (Vernallis 2020: 7). At the same time, an audiovisual format’s genesis is further complicated by the ways in which its audial and visual components are merged at different stages of collaboration and interaction. From producers and runners to location managers and make-up artists, a multitude of co-creators often contribute to the final version of a filmic project. When such projects specifically focus on the study of music, then a multitude of contributors with expertise in sound-based forms of expression – including musicians, singers, sound designers, translators, and beyond – may also join the fray (if they had not done so already) with varying degrees of involvement.

In order to negotiate and process the different perspectives which emerge and interact throughout these collaborations, Fred Moten draws from jazz music traditions to articulate how experimental combinations of sounds and images might overlap across a variety of theoretical disciplines and creative practices. He highlights ‘improvisation’ as a method of producing art and the ‘ensemble’ as a framework through which to structure groups who produce art, thereby exploring how such strategies are adopted by radical Afrodiasporic artists at different stages of creation in a manner akin to a band’s jamming sessions (Moten 2003).

In different ways, the submissions to *Musicology on Screen* similarly echo the musical spontaneity of jazz ensembles. *Painting in a Void* is concerned with the audiovisual narration of the spontaneous creative processes of ensemble improvisation involved in the experimental multimedia performance piece, *Kūkaku*. In a quite different context, *Afro-Sampas* explores music improvisation among the creative diasporas, the non-written music resulting from the encounter of Brazilian and African musicians based in São Paulo. The documentary film becomes a collaborative platform through which to perform the “cultural hospitality” that musicians have struggled to find in some other contexts, as stated by Congolese musician, Yannick Delass, one of the improvising protagonists in the film. Reflecting on improvisation in digital contexts, *The Mountain Electric* draws from more than 30 unscripted interviews with ambient musicians to explore how attendees of Mountain Skies Electronic Music Festival improvise and interact when creating music. Merje Laiapea argues that her analytic method in *Feeling in Truth* must be “as improvisational as the rich sound culture” that underpins her subject matter, an audiovisual collaboration between musician Kamasi Washington and filmmaker AG Rojas that mines the multisensory possibilities of Afrodiasporic aesthetics. The team who pooled their talents together for *Gūlā: Music for a sacred time* admit that they “did not start with a plan” but instead sought to take a decolonial approach to the filmmaking process by “focussing on the experience and perspectives of participants rather than [their] own.” Similarly, when making *Ganpati: Sacred in the Making*, Eugenio Giorgianni sought to develop a collaborative, participatory audiovisual approach that was led by the dynamics of fieldwork and the ritual participants being filmed. Giorgianni made the film at the request of Terry, the main ‘subject’ in the film, and as stated in his research statement, “... it is Terry, not me, who holds the direction of the filmic encounter, retaining much of the control over my position in the field, and what is happening in front of the camera lens, in a sort of decolonial inversion of authorial agency”.

The filmmakers positioned alongside each other within this collection also (in)advertently adopt what we might term a ‘call and response’ approach to audiovisual creation, relying on

and trusting participants to negotiate their collaborations through a willingness to adapt and extemporise in response to unexpected situations. In *The Cuban Music Room* Sarah McGuinness and Sonia Perez-Cassola innovate in the various phases of production in order to find faithful ways of capturing sound, as experienced by live musicians and participants in Cuba. The immersion sought through the split screen is then seen augmented, in a London-based festival installation listening-viewing setting. This jazz-inspired understanding of creation similarly mirrors how the readers, viewers and listeners who interact with this special issue may also ‘improvise’ when engaging with *Musicology on Screen*, like the “Paulistano” public Jasper Chalcraft and Rose Satiko Gitirana Hikiji refer to in *Afro-Sampas*, “improvising access to different cultural expression”, moving between different submissions – shifting back and forth research statements and the audiovisual components of the submissions – in unexpected, unanticipated ways.

On both theoretical and practical levels, this special issue aims to foster new dialogues between different parts of the globe. While Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (written when the abstract ‘Man of Reason’ notion dominated Enlightenment discourses) concludes with the final line: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (Wittgenstein 1922: Proposition 7), Obioma Nnaemeka’s theorisation of ‘negofeminism’ stands for “the feminism of negotiation” as well as “no ego” because “the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance” (Nnaemeka 2004: 377-378). Drawing from this Afro-feminist spirit of negotiation while, simultaneously, seeking to bring distinctive voices from across the world into fruitful conversations through a combination of music, sound and moving images, we might take Wittgenstein’s Eurocentric line of thought a step further – closer to the decolonisation of the mind – by merging it with Nnaemeka’s ideas and emphasising: “Whereof cannot speak, thereof one must be silent – *and listen.*”

Dr Estrella Sendra and guest editors [Dr Barley Norton](#) (Goldsmiths, University of London) and [Dr Joseph Owen Jackson](#) (SOAS, University of London).

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